Discoveries in Indonesia

A very productive season of archaeological fieldwork was held in the Lake Towuti region of Sulawesi, Indonesia during September and October. The fieldwork team was led by Sue O’Connor and included Jack Fenner, Ambra Calo, Tim Maloney, Rose Whitau, and a number of Indonesian and international colleagues. After obtaining permits and consulting with Indonesian officials in Jakarta and Makassar, the team first established a base camp in Wawondula on the north-west shore of Lake Towuti. Excavation in nearby rockshelter Gua Andomo yielded a temporally mixed assemblage of pottery, lithic and glass artefacts, while the open-air site of Saone yielded a significant lithic assemblage. The team then took a ferry across Lake Towuti, established a new base of operations in the village of Rauta, and excavated a pair of test pits in rockshelter Gua Lampetia. These pits revealed a Bronze Age jar burial, an extended burial and a relatively small assemblage of pottery sherds and other artefacts. They then moved about 15 km south-east to the village of Walondare and began simultaneous excavations in two nearby rockshelters. Both of these excavations produced robust sequences of lithics, freshwater snail shell and fragmented animal bone, much of it burnt. Based on the stratigraphy, artefact types, and depths of known deposits, we are hopeful that the occupations at these sites extend back into the Pleistocene. Research on excavated materials is ongoing, and we expect to return next year to extend the excavations both laterally and vertically. Survey of nearby rockshelters known to Walondare residents also identified several other good candidates for possible future work.

In Other News

Congratulations to Sue O’Connor on her ANU Media Award for the highest international impact from a media release. The release was related to the 42 thousand year old fish hook uncovered by her excavations in East Timor.

Congratulations also to Simon Haberle for his promotion to full professor.
Recent Publications


A Bone or Two to Pick

In November, the Master of Archaeological Science Program hosted a Masterclass (ARCH8037), Faunal Analysis in Archaeology and Palaeoecology. This is the first time running for this subject which will be offered by the program in the Spring Session (October-December) every other year, alternating with the Masterclass in Shell Midden Analysis (jointly presented by the MArchSci program and ANH).

This cross-collegiate class offered students insight into the methods for recovery, preservation and identification of vertebrate faunal remains through to the approaches on quantification and interpretation in the dual contexts of archaeology and palaeoecology by combining in-class learning followed by hands-on experience in the laboratory in a 7-day intensive course. The course was taught by Ken Aplin (Smithsonian Institute and ANU Visiting Fellow) with contributions from Jack Fenner and Kristy Douglas (Heritage representative). The class covered topics such as archaeological and palaeoecological interpretation of faunal assemblages, taxonomic identification of remains, prehistoric human behaviour and diet, ancient DNA and stable isotope analysis and heritage issues of faunal sites in Australia. The final day included a trip to local sites containing faunal remains in context for students to conceptually apply the theories and techniques they learned during the week. Further information about this and other Masterclasses can be found at: http://archaeology.anu.edu.au/archaeologicalscience/short-courses

Students working to identify faunal material.
Grants and Awards

Jack Fenner was awarded a 2012 Research School of Asia and the Pacific Research Development Grant for his Tongan Strontium Isotope Laboratory Comparison project. This project is intended to determine whether unusual strontium stable isotope ratios previously obtained on archeological human and faunal remains from Tonga were due to laboratory error or are indicative of surprising cultural behaviour.

Jay Chin won the 2012 round of AINSE (The Australian Institute of Nuclear Science and Engineering) Postgraduate Research Awards, which assists research projects associated with nuclear science or its applications. This award grants access to the national facilities at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation at Lucas Heights. Jay will be working with Henk Heijnis and his team at the Environmental Radioactivity Measurement Centre to undertake analysis such as Pb210 dating, ITRAX and grain size on sediment samples from Tasmania. The first visit took place in November and further visits are expected throughout her PhD.

Christian Reepmeyer was awarded a DECRA from the ARC for his project entitled “Foundations of Island Southeast Asia maritime interaction.”

Osteological Studies and Southeast Asia

David Bulbeck was invited by Phillip Endicott to participate in the “Negrito hypothesis” workshop held at the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris from 3-5 September. The invitees included some 30 geneticists, biological anthropologists, social anthropologists, historical linguists and archaeologists from over 10 countries. There was general agreement that the Negritos provide valuable insight into the initial expansion of Homo sapiens from Africa to Australasia in the Late Pleistocene. However, there also ensued lively discussion between those who viewed Negritos as relics from Southeast Asia’s forager past, prior to the immigration of Austronesian and Austroasiatic speaking farming populations, and others who were sceptical about treating Negritos as a single population block compared to other Southeast Asians.

David’s contribution was titled “Osteological affinities of Southeast Asia’s ‘Negritos’ and the concordance with mtDNA results”. He and other workshop participants were invited to submit their work for publication in a special volume of Human Biology to cover the workshop contributions.

David subsequently spent a week recording the human skulls from the Neolithic or Early Metal Phase jar-burial site of Melolo, in Sumba. The skulls, held at the Tropenmuseum Anthropology Department in Amsterdam, were excavated by Rodenwaldt in the mid 20th century. The research is part of a planned project on the chronology and social implications of Indonesian prehistoric jar burials, involving Sue O’Connor, Daud Tanudirjo, Rachel Wood and other researchers. The help provided by the curator Koos van Brakel and his assistants in accessing the collection was invaluable.

Lab Notes

The ANH Archaeology and Palaeoenvironmental Stable Isotope Sample Preparation Facility is now operational. This facility, funded by an ANU Major Equipment Committee grant to Jack Fenner and Janelle Stevenson, provides ANU staff and students the capability to pre-process archaeologically relevant organic and environmental sediment cores for stable isotope ratio analysis within a quarantine laboratory facility. Most recently, the facility was used to extract collagen from human and animal bones recovered from archaeological sites in southeastern Mongolia. Carbon and nitrogen stable isotope ratios in this collagen are currently being measured at the ANU RSB IRMS lab, and should provide insight into the spread of millet and the importance of pastoralism during the Bronze Age and Mongolian Periods.
Judith’s Travels

In September, Judith Cameron undertook research at the headquarters of the Indian Archaeological Society in Delhi, working with Sunil Gupta on textile materials from the site of Kamrej, an important Indo-Roman entrepôt. She has subsequently identified the fibres as asbestos and is now analysing spindle whorls from the excavations.

At the invitation of Professor Pierre Manguin (EFEO) and archaeologists from the Urasan Arkeologi Nasional (Indonesia), Judith has begun analysis of tiny textile fragments found during the excavations of Batujaya, known in historical sources as Tarumanagara, the oldest Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in Indonesia.

On the 30th October, Judith Cameron attended a dinner at Parliament House hosted by the Prime Minister. Chaired by Adam Spencer, the event was in recognition of the contribution of scientists to Australian Society. Among the awards presented were the Prime Minister’s Prize for Science awarded to Ken Freeman for more than 40 years research in Astronomy at Mt. Stromlo and the ANU. Freeman is noted for putting “dark matter” on the galactic map. He describes his current research into the age and movement of stars as “galactic archaeology!”

Conus Shell from PNG

In the early 1900s thirteen engraved Conus shell valuables were dug from prehistoric midden mounds in Oro Province. Since the late 1960s nineteen undated surface finds have been found in the northern Massim of Milne Bay Province.

When three artefacts became available for AMS radiocarbon dating, provided they were restored after sampling to their original visual appearance, a specialist team was assembled and this paper reports its findings regarding the thirty-two shells. The paper covers sampling and conservation, dating (including new information on the local oceanic reservoir effect), distribution, art, depositional and cultural histories.

These distinctive Conus shell valuables are part of the material culture found along the northern coast of the eastern tip of New Guinea and on the islands of the northern Massim during the Expansion Phase c. 1000–500 BP. Their decoration is comparable to that produced by Milne Bay Province woodcarvers in historic times. This continuity makes them the oldest radiocarbon dated artefacts decorated in the Massim art style.

Bushapple Pie in Kakadu

By: Billy O’Foglu

On November 13th Ulrike Prose, Sally Brockwell, Matthew Prebble, Janelle Stevenson and myself journeyed with Lotty Feakins and Annie Clarke (University of Sydney) from Darwin, into the flourishing heart of Kakadu National Park. The collective interests and intentions of our fieldwork spanned all things palynological, historical and archaeological and these were abundantly realised. We were led through landscapes strewn with lithics fashioned for purposes both known and lost. Places alas now ravaged by buffalo and wild pigs. We were shown historical camps, such as that of the legendary Tom Cole, which boasted worked glass, the brass bones of ancient automobiles, and trees laden with syzygium bush apples. We were lead safely through asbestos ghost towns; long since abandoned testaments to illness that arise from their jungle shrouds in a manner reminiscent of the LOST television series. Though archaeological earth mounds abounded, my main joy was stumbling across a modern earth mound, and enough information to form an experimental archaeology chapter in my thesis. But the greatest joy for all must surely have been my bushapple pie. The recipe for which is simple: bushapples, honey, butter and oats. When stewed and sweetened they taste rather of cinnamon apple but with the texture and form of rhubarb, what’s not to like? Well, you may have to battle a few thousand green ants for the fruit; so I advise you acquire them with a fully extended telescopic ranging pole. On the 25th of the same month we returned to Canberra, which was an odd experience for me because for the first time in my life I found myself checking the weather on my phone and musing “36°C? Oh, it’ll be cool then.”

“...you may have to battle a few thousand green ants for the fruit...”

Conference Update

A strong contingent of ANH archaeologists attended the 14th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists (EurASEAA) held in Dublin in September. Hosted by the University College, the conference was held in Dublin Castle. Judith Cameron presented a paper entitled “Fibre Technology in Southeast Asian Archaeology” in the Hunter-gatherer session. Noel Hidalgo Tan chaired the Rock Art session and presented a paper “Coincidence or confluence? Rock art in the sacred sites of Mainland Southeast Asia” as well as a poster “The Hidden Paintings of Angkor Wat.” Christian Reepmeyer presented a paper with Daryl Wesley “Urmrarning (Red Lily Dreaming) – a case study for the application of non-destructive geochemical pXRF on rock art pigments” in the Rock Art session.

... Noel Hidalgo Tan’s poster, “The Hidden Paintings of Angkor Wat” won runner up best student poster at the 2012 AAA in Wollongong.
Research in Archaeology and Natural History at the ANU School of Culture, History and Language aims to understand prehistoric human societies, the environments in which they developed and the environmental consequences of human presence. Departmental research ranges from southeast Asia and the Pacific, through the tropical forests of New Guinea and the savannahs of Australia, to the islands of Oceania.

Field research in ANH is supported by well-equipped laboratories that were fully updated and refurbished during 2009. Our laboratories support research into prehistoric textiles, archaeobotanical remains, rock art, prehistoric environments, zoological material and ceramics. ANH houses the largest pollen reference collection in Australia, as well as plant, bone, shell and ceramic collections. We also have access to world-class ANU facilities for archaeological dating, stable isotope analysis, and electron microscopy.

Archaeology and Natural History
School of Culture, History & Language
College of Asia & the Pacific
ANU

HC Coombs Building 9
Australian National University
Canberra, ACT 0200
Australia
Website: http://chl.anu.edu.au/archaeology/

For newsletter inquiries and contributions please email:
Ella.Ussher@anu.edu.au or
K.Seikel@anu.edu.au

Upcoming Events ...

Morning Teas
A new sign-up sheet will be posted in the new year.

Lunchtime Talks
Please sign up for empty time slots with Janelle.

Conferences
3-7 April 2013: Society for American Archaeology Meeting, Honolulu, Hawaii